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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000691

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AMCONSUL LAGOS FOR DEA, GAYE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [NG](#)
SUBJECT: DRUGS THROUGH NIGER? LOCAL VIEWS ON NARCOTICS
ROUTES

REF: A. HARKENRIDER - GAYE E-MAIL EXCHANGE OF 4/19/07
[1](#)B. KORAN - GAYE E-MAIL OF 5/2/07
[1](#)C. NIAMEY 616

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SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) On May 7, Poloff met with officials in the Nigerien border town of Birni N'Konni, ninety kilometers north of Sokoto, Nigeria. The local Prefect, chief judge, and Procurer (prosecutor) described drug seizures and their perceptions of a drug trafficking route through the town and through Niger generally. A May 14 meeting with the police chief of another Nigerien border town - Maradi - built on this story. The chief posited two additional trafficking routes: via Niger's western neighbors, and across Niger's sparsely-populated eastern desert region. In light of two recent drug seizures involving Nigeriens (Refs A B), and GON allegations that drug traffickers are responsible for violence in the country's nomadic north (Reftel C), local perceptions of drug trafficking corridors merit further investigation. END SUMMARY

HARDLY A WEEK GOES BY...

[1](#)2. (SBU) Niger in microcosm, Birni N'Konni thrives on and suffers from its proximity to Nigeria. While the sale of illicit Nigerian gasoline, for example, has long plagued legitimate gas stations and posed a public fire hazard, Emboffs heard about a new preoccupation during our recent trip to Konni. The Prefect of Birni N'Konni Department, Mamane Lamine Amani, claimed that "hardly a week goes by when we don't seize some marijuana or amphetamines" coming across the border. He also noted that local police had seized some illegal arms, though he was unable to offer details. The President of the Konni Tribunal, Hamza Assoumana Bayere, had more information. He claimed that there is significant drug trafficking through Konni. For the last two years, local police have seized marijuana and amphetamines on a regular basis.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Konni's Procurer, Ibrahim Oumarou, offered a broader perspective on trafficking. He noted that, while large quantities of marijuana and amphetamines transit Konni on their way to the Mahgreb and Europe, most seizures take place in the northern Nigerien cities of Tahoua or Agadez. Yet, in each instance, GON authorities have discovered that the drugs

and their Nigerian traffickers have passed through Konni. Judge Bayere reinforced the procurer's argument. He has recently shifted to Konni from Gaya, a town on the Niger / Benin / Nigeria border. The judge noted that he saw little evidence of drug trafficking in Gaya, but much in Konni. Poloff's subsequent meetings with GON officials in Zinder, Maradi, and Magaria produced no evidence of drug trafficking via those border towns. It therefore seems that drug traffickers from Nigeria favor the Sokoto - Konni - Tahoua - Agadez route over other alternatives.

MORE FROM MARADI: SENIOR GON POLICEMAN OFFERS
PERSPECTIVE ON ROUTES, SOURCES, AND SMUGGLERS

¶4. (SBU) None of our interlocutors in Konni would hazard a guess as to the ultimate source of the drugs passing through town. The Director of the National Police in Maradi, however, had much to say in response to this question. Director Boube Souley, previously assigned to the National Police Detective Branch and the UN Mission in DRC, claimed that West African drug trafficking follows a well-beaten path from Guinea, (where he speculated that drugs may arrive from Latin America via the port), through Cote D'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Niger or Mali. He went so far as to describe Burkina Faso as a "reservoir" of illicit drugs. He claimed that there was considerable demand for marijuana and amphetamines in Libya, which, along with Europe, provided demand for the trans-Saharan trade. In addition to the more western route, Souley claimed that ethnic Arabs from Chad and Niger trafficked drugs to Libya through the far-eastern Nigerien towns of N'Guigmi, Bilma, and Dirkou. In general, he noted that traffickers take advantage of corruption and political instability in Guinea and Cote D'Ivoire, and Niger and Mali's poorly policed and thinly populated desert regions to move their wares.

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FALLOUT: KONNI'S (STILL) MODEST DRUG CULTURE

¶5. (SBU) Drug trafficking through Niger has its local effects. While Nigeriens see high profile seizures like those in Tahoua and Agadez as being too large for local consumption, Judge Bayere's Konni docket is full of small possession and sale cases. A culture of drug use has grown in Konni of late, with both rural and urban youth leading the trend. Penalties for possession or consumption range from fifteen days to six month in jail; those for sale or trafficking from five to ten years. Yet, the judge noted that one can purchase a tea-bag size packet of marijuana (the typical quantity sold in Niger) in Nigeria for fifteen CFA and re-sell it in Niger for fifty CFA - powerful incentive for unemployed local youth. (Note: approximately 500 CFA = 1 \$US End note.) Procurer Oumarou argued that penalties for personal use or possession were neither harsh enough nor implemented with sufficient rigor. While Konni's cops seize one to three kilos of marijuana every so often, narcotics are still easy enough to find. Judge Bayere noted that the square in front of a prominent mosque has turned into a popular drug and alcohol sale point. Procurer Oumarou was concerned that drug and alcohol abuse was exacerbating age-old conflicts between farmers and herders and contributing to small crimes.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: This was Emboffs' first investigation of drug trafficking in Niger and it appears Nigerien officials are willing to speak candidly about the issue and welcome international intervention - a tendency apparent at the top of the GON as well as at the working level. President Tandja's call for the UN Office of Drugs and Crime to study the problem and recommend solutions (Reftel C) suggests that the GON is beginning to tackle an issue that has disquieting linkages to conflict in the north and a culture of youth

unemployment and alienation in the south. END COMMENT

17. (U) Tripoli, minimize considered.

ALLEN